Foucault premises his argument about the development of our modern “ethic” of sexuality from early Christian sources on virginity and marriage on the idea that the juridical law of the Bible is replaced by the veridical practice of confession. Confession can only regulate “le rapport de soi à soi”1 if the self is not held to the outside standard of the law. This generates a hermeneutic problem: how can the written text of the law be interpreted not as a juridical code or standard, but as an impetus toward veridical practice? Although Foucault is interested in the development of practice much more than in the development of theology from the new hermeneutical structures being introduced by Christian authors, the prerequisite for these practices is the transformation of the law, a theological tenet premised on the abolition of Judaism and Judaic reading practices.

In this paper, I intend to follow the two mentions of Judaism in Foucault’s text, and to trace how the transformation of the law into the model of subjectivity that Foucault considers central to the modern intertwining of self and sexuality is premised on the abolition of Jewish hermeneutics. I do not do this in order to show that Foucault has forgotten the Jews, whom he ought to have included—his principle of selection of texts, while not laid out before us in an introduction, appears to focus on the creation of a culturally Catholic practice of sexuality and subjectivity to which Judaism has long since ceased to be an immediate reference and threat. I do this rather to show that the practices of virginity through which Foucault traces our modern conceptions of sexuality and subjectivity are themselves embedded in a theological conception of history that requires a new hermeneutic practice that devolves upon the self rather than on the text.

Far from quibbling with Foucault or attempting to supersede him, I am attempting to make sense of his method, and to understand how the categories of history and hermeneutics, which he

1 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité v.4: Les Aveux de la Chair* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), 50.
deploy alongside ethics and practice, are inscribed upon the body. Part of this is an attempt to understand which bodies are inscribed, what separates the Jew from the Christian in a history that moves from one to the other. The Jew, from within a Christian theological framework, is a historical hinge, and examining the presence of the figure of the Jew in this text can yield insights about how the body is implicated by theology, history, and, ultimately, hermeneutics, as well as the present but unspoken question of which bodies belong where in the synchronic conception of time’s diachronic procession.

Both explicit mentions of Judaism occur in “Être vierge,” the section devoted to the development of virginity as the grounds for the veridical subject, and both are unmarked paraphrases of other authors. In the first instance, Foucault opens his section on John Chrysostom by describing how virginity organizes a philosophical hierarchy for that thinker: “Chrysostome reconnaît que les Grecs ont ‘admiré et vénéré’ la virginité. Ainsi les place-t-il au-dessus des juifs qui s’en seraient détournés avec mépris—comme le prouve leur haine pour le Christ né d’une vierge—, mais au-dessous de l’Église de Dieu qui seul lui aurait apporté son zèle.” The hierarchy stated here essentially a paraphrase of the first remarks in Chrysostom’s On Virginity, and provides Foucault with the grounds to examine the difference between the Christian conception virginity and that of Greek philosophers. Yet this hierarchy indexes not only a spatial array of concepts, but a set of temporal relationships valid within a theological conception of history.

The hermeneutic significance of this concept of history becomes apparent in Foucault’s citation of John Cassian regarding the necessity of virginity for understanding: “Il faut renoncer à la fornication du corps si on veut comprendre les Écritures, mais il faut aussi se tenir éloigné de cette ‘fornication’ que sont les ceremonies idolâtres, les superstitions païennes, les augures, les presages, et

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2 Ibid., 178-9.
This time paraphrasing Cassian, whose hermeneutics elaborate the concept of history visible in Chrysostom’s hierarchy of non-believers, Foucault finds himself transcribing another reference to Judaism without examining it further. But it is not irrelevant to his project: the description of Jewish hermeneutic practice as “fornication” ties understanding to the body, a body considered within the confines of a Christian theology and its attendant concept of history.

Moving from the paraphrastic to the original and back again, I will examine how the place of these statements in the work of John Chrysostom and John Cassian illuminates the role of Jewish flesh in the constructing the history of the Christian, and how the notions of theology, history and hermeneutics imported with their conception of the flesh inflect Foucault’s genealogy of the modern subject. In doing so, I hope to show how the theological condition of Christian history produces a bifurcation of hermeneutics into that of the letter and of the spirit that Foucault, in his pursuit of modern subjectivity and sexuality, does not notice. To claim that supersessionist theology is present in Chrysostom and Cassian is rather akin to claiming that water is wet, so the real purpose of this paper is to show that Foucault, while not himself engaging in supersessionist theology, overlooks how the body must be inscribed in this theology and history in order to produce the particular hermeneutic, the “rapport de soi à soi,” whose eventual result is the modern subject.

Judeo-Christianity and its Fate

For Foucault, the concept is a discursive construct; this is equally true of the concept of history. The
examination of discursive constructs being the purpose of his iteration of genealogy, one would think that he would not only examine the discipline of history as a discourse, but that he would be aware of the concept of history at work in each instantiation of that discipline. Indeed, he appears to be: in “Subjectivité et Vérité,” his 1980-1981 course at the Collège de France, he critiques the periods by which historical analysis organizes its objects of study (and more importantly, its disciplines) as constructs of the discipline itself. Commenting upon Peter Brown’s 1978 book, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Foucault asks how it would be possible to effect a “‘partage des eaux…entre ce qu’on appelle le christianisme et ce qu’on appelle le paganisme,’” given that paganism (and, presumably, Christianity) collects under one term an enormous diversity of practices. The implied unity of paganism, unjustifiable under examination, ought rather to be seen as the product of an array of discourses (themselves diverse, and deserving of their own histories) that have constituted the concept of paganism to suit their own ideological purposes. His critique of historical periods and objects of analysis functions as a justification of his method and its contemporary relevance: concepts that we today take for granted are the products of discourses whose history requires elucidation so that we can historicize our present, and examine the ideologies to which our concepts are bound.

The relevance of paganism to the present moment, Foucault contends, is indissociable from its apparent adversary, Judeo-Christianity. Further, he contends that Judeo-Christianity is not only heteronymous, but that it actually paradoxical because of the mutually exclusive constitution of Christianity from Judaism:

Prenons comme repère, comme point de départ, les premiers grands textes antijuïdaïques et

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11 Among the discourses that have constituted themselves with reference to the concept of paganism, Foucault mentions early Christian heresiological literature, philosophy of the seventeenth century, and many cultural products of the nineteenth century. Ibid., 41.
antisémites que l’on peut trouver dans la littérature chrétienne des IVe-Ve siècles… Disons que, depuis ce moment-là jusqu’à pratiquement la fin du XVIIe siècle, penser le judéo-christianisme—une sorte d’identité historique, transhistorique, métahistorique due judaïsme et du christianisme—, c’était quelque chose de rigoureusement impossible. Et puis cette notion est devenue possible.  

Here, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism are posed as evidence that denies an identity between Christianity and Judaism, a valid and important point with regard to a nineteenth century conflation of the two sides of the hyphen, such that Judeo-Christianity can be considered on the same side of history (the Western), against the equally fictive construction of paganism. It seems, however, that Foucault also reads Christian polemics against Judaism with, ironically, too much good faith, presuming that the two cannot be connected simply because they are mutually exclusive. Or perhaps it would be better to say that Foucault, in his 1981 lecture and in Les Aveux de la chair, does not fully think through how the claim of Christian polemicists to have excluded, indeed, supplanted, Judaism, itself constitutes a historical connection set into the foundation of theology that demands of the human a hermeneutic relationship with herself that produces, eventually, the subject.

At the end of his somewhat lengthy excursus on Judeo-Christianity, Foucault excuses himself from further consideration of the topic: “Laissons donc tomber paganisme et judéo-christianisme en nous disant bien que [ces catégories] ne relèvent pas d’une méthodologie historique, mais peuvent être tout au plus l’objet d’une étude historique.” Indeed, he is justified in doing so, as the object of his study is the continuity between “pagan” Christian sexual morality, rather than the ontology of particular religions and their relations to one another. The only reason to examine his treatment of Judeo-Christianity as an oversight is because the fourth volume of his history of sexuality presents what are, in his views, the particularity of Christian practices—that which separates them from their pagan counterparts—depends upon theological developments that are bound to a concept of history directed (rhetorically speaking) against Judaism.

12 Ibid., 42.
13 Ibid., 43.
14 Ibid., 44.
This is not a historical point, but a theoretical one: despite the lack of an introduction and conclusion to frame the somewhat convoluted series of close readings, it becomes clear when Foucault arrives at his discussion of virginity that the value of the virgin depends on his or her relation to God.\textsuperscript{15} This relation to God can only exist within the theological structure still developing among Christian writers and rhetors in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century CE, and that theological structure entails a concept of history, the necessity of which becomes clear precisely in the status of the virgin. Foucault focuses on the problem of pagan virgins, and pagan writings concerning continence. If non-Christians practiced arts of life in a “Christian” manner, do those acts have the same value? The answer is always no, for two reasons: first, because the arrival of Christ bifurcated history into the unredeemed and redeemed era, and second, because Christian practice requires intention in order to be Christian. Thus, pagans who practiced virginity did not do so with the same intention as Christian virgins, and cannot have achieved the same level of holiness. The place of Jewish practice in Christian theological history is more complicated, in part because Jews and Christians are divided precisely over the issue of practice.

Jews, according to Christian polemic, do not practice virginity, rather remaining faithful to the commandment of Genesis 1.28: “Be fertile and increase.”\textsuperscript{16} Virginity, in such a schema, is a refusal of God’s commandment, and prohibited. In the portions of Foucault’s text that I will discuss, he paraphrases authors who conflate the absence of virginity in Jewish sexual practice with a certain fleshliness, or carnality, in their hermeneutic practice. When one’s practice is defined by the proper orientation of one’s attention in a historical era determined by a particular theology, not only do Jews not practice virginity of the physical body, but they insist on the primacy of the physical

\textsuperscript{15} Foucault, \textit{Les aveux de la chair}, 178 [CHECK PAGE, INCLUDE QUOTE].
word. Their hermeneutic practice remains in a carnal state along with their bodies, and refuses the Christian virginity of the body along with the spirit of the word. Judeo-Christianity indeed seems like a paradox. Yet Christianity builds the value of virginity, the need to interpret the text, the requirement to direct attention toward God, and the need to interpret oneself to make sure that one does not follow the path of the body, on the rejection of its rhetorically constructed Other, Judaism.

To ignore this other is to elide the importance of theology and history in the determination of the “intention” which will, in the final chapters, become for Foucault the defining feature of both the veridical and the juridical subject. Examining the role that Judaism plays in John Chrysostom’s *On Virginity*, and in John Cassian’s *Conferences*, will allow us to better see the relationship between theology, history and hermeneutics in Foucault’s genealogy of the subject.

**A Stony Table and a Fleshy**

John Chrysostom provides Foucault with a full-fledged polemical justification of virginity, placing it in tension with social and sexual reproductive relations that produce value within the confines of the social sphere. He is not the only one, of course—Foucault also examines the tractates on virginity written by Saint Ambrose and Gregory of Nyssa, and uses their work to trace the boundaries of a new social sphere in which virginity is the location of value and the mode of reproduction. It is Chrysostom, however, who provides an explanation of the Christian theological conception of history within which this becomes possible. History, it turns out, is inscribed within virginity: virginity is not possible under “la loi de mort,” but only in “le temps de perfection, celui où la pratique de la virginité doit se conjuguer à un monde qui s’achève. Conjugaison qui a été rendue possible, qui est maintenant nécessaire et qui est paradoxalement féconde.” Pagan virginity, on this

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19 Ibid.
account, has no soteriological value in part because “sous la loi de la mort, le mariage était un précepte,”\(^\text{20}\) and because, in the redeemed world, “le moment n’est pas loin où le Christ reviendra,”\(^\text{21}\) ending the history of earthly life and its continual compensation for death. Virginity’s embeddedness in an “économie des temps”\(^\text{22}\) is what bestows its soteriological value.

And what is the place of the Jew in the temporal economy of Christianity? To declare Judaism the foundational figure against which Christianity shaped its concepts of history and hermeneutics is not new, but to see Foucault focus on virginity’s role in articulating those concepts without examining one of the discourses at its base gives pause. The figure of the Jew is so central that it leaves its mark, even without being accounted for. In paraphrasing Chrysostom, Foucault incidentally inscribes his reliance on the figure of the Jew, but leaves it without emphasis, an remainder of the source to which he imputes no real value.\(^\text{23}\) Chrysostom, however, frames his discussion of virginity in terms of the Jew: “The Jews disdain the honor of virginity, and this is not astonishing because they have dishonored Christ himself, born of a virgin.”\(^\text{24}\) For Foucault, this remark is of little importance, serving only to complete the “hiérarchie historico-religieuse”\(^\text{25}\) in which the paganism displaces Judaism and slides in directly below Christianity. This hierarchy, in context of Foucault’s reading of Greek and Christian sources, seems to be a transposition of historical time into conceptual space—the organization of history according to affiliation rather than filiation—that effectively justifies the erasure of Judaism. But, as Foucault’s paraphrase suggests, Judaism was central to the Christian discourse on history and hermeneutics in which virginity took

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\(^{20}\) A precept for two reasons: marriage was required in order to compensate for death, and to apprentice man to the practice of continence that would prepare him for virginity in the redeemed world. The fact that it was a precept at all removes marriage from the sphere of virtue, however—from Chrysostom onward, virtue is a result of choice, and exercise of the will. This is critical for understanding the relationship between Chrysostom’s writing on virginity and marriage, and Augustine’s, which Foucault considers indispensable to understanding the modern subject. Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 195.

\(^{22}\) Ibid. 194

\(^{23}\) “Chrysostome reconnaît que les Grecs ont ‘admiré et vénéré’ la virginité. Ainsi les place-t-il au-dessus des juifs qui s’en seraient détournés avec mépris—comme le prouve leur haine pour le Christ né d’une vierge—, mais au-dessous de l’Église de Dieu qui seul lui aurait apporté son zèle.” Ibid., 178-9.


\(^{25}\) Foucault, \textit{Les aveux de la chair}, 178.
on the significance that relates it to the development of the modern subject.

For Chrysostom, so cognizant of history’s significance and rapidly approaching end, virginity is dependent on intent. Moving on from his first mention of Judaism in the opening to On Virginity, he declares, “Fasting and virginity are neither good nor evil in themselves, but from the purpose of those who practice them comes each of these qualities.”26 His focus on intent extends logically from virginity to the realm of all virtuous action, which is why virginity is not mandated: “By saying that marriage is forbidden, virtuous action becomes no longer a matter of deliberate choice, but an obligation to obey the law.”27 In order to be a virtue, virtuous action, including the practice of virginity, must be undertaken as a choice. Such a focus on intent over practice opens up a problem in Foucault’s account: how do we trace the history of practices that produce the “rapport de soi à soi” when practice is subordinated to intention? If the practices of pagan virginity and that of Christian are identical, yet still different enough to account for the importance of Christianity to the modern subject, then the shifts in the discourses that define these practices must be accounted for. Regarding Chrysostom, that means accounting for the theological conception of history in which virginity has replaced marital sex, intent has replaced obedience, and the Christian has replaced the Jew.

The role of Judaism in Chrysostom is quite well known,28 and though it appears in On Virginity, its significance cannot be appreciated without examining his homilies on Paul’s epistles. It is no secret that Paul is foundational to Christian hermeneutics, Christian supersessionism, and their connection. Reading Chrysostom’s homilies on First and Second Corinthians, it is possible to see how his low estimation of Jewish attitudes toward virginity indexes a theology, history and

26 Chrysostom, On Virginity, 6.
27 Ibid., 11.
28 While Foucault does not cite it, there is a collection of his homilies entitled “Contre les Juifs” thought to have been given around x date in Antioch in response to apparently “Judaizing” activity (for more, see author, C. Mervyn Maxwell, “Introduction,” Homilies Against the Jews (dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966.) More than that, it is apparent in Chrysostom’s reading of Paul in the homilies on Second Corinthians that his theology and hermeneutics require a supersessionist conception of history.
hermeneutics founded on the exclusion of the Jew—and more importantly, how virginity itself indexes the dialectic between Christianity and Judaism that Foucault discounts.

The homilies are extensive, but even a more or less cursory glance, with some special attention reserved for the most influential of Paul’s passages yields insights and provides context for Foucault’s paraphrase. In his homilies on First Corinthians, Chrysostom gives a clear account of the structure of intention and interpretation into which virginity will be interpolated. The misunderstanding common to believers is a dominant theme throughout the homilies; Chrysostom declares that even a shared language is completely different from non-believer to believer: “I hear the ‘Body of Christ’; in one sense I understand the expression, in another sense the unbeliever.”

It is actually somewhat difficult to argue with this point, because without its symbolic value, the body of Christ is little more than another dying body, or worse, inert bread. Only within a Christian frame can the body of Christ take on the meaning that Chrysostom and Paul attribute to it. A particular danger of misunderstanding falls on the Jews, because the Jews are closer to Christians than the pagans: to understand in the Christian manner, they must break the laws set forth in the text. But this observance of this law is itself a refusal of understanding. In a long passage regarding the Jewish and the Christian Passover, Chrysostom writes:

For tell me, what is the meaning of the Lamb’s being a Male, and Unblemished, and a year old, and of, a bone shall not be broken? (Ex 12.4) and what means the command to call the neighbors also, and that it should be eaten standing and in the evening; or the fortifying of the house with a wall of blood? He will have nothing else to say but over all about Egypt. But I can tell you the meaning both of the Blood, and of the Evening, and the Eating all together,

29 John Chrysostom, Homilies on I Corinthians, 80.
30 Chrysostom, speaking on Cor 2.16, is preoccupied with how anyone unaccustomed to Christian belief can achieve Christian understanding and salvation. While the Greeks, he argued, were in the grip of an illustrious culture of longstanding and would have thus been justified in their dismissal of Christian wisdom, they did not. The Jews, on the other hand, were asked only to abrogate certain aspects of the law while remaining in service of the same God. This should have made it easier for them to adopt Christianity, in his view. Chrysostom does, however, admit the problem with such an assumption: “when they bade [presumably Jewish] men worship God, they bade them break many of his laws.” Chrysostom, Homily 7.14, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, 92.
31 The Jewish Passover being the lamb’s blood used to indicate the children who would be saved before the exodus from Egypt; the Christian being Christ’s blood used to expiate the sins of humanity before the end of the world.
and of the run that all should be standing.\textsuperscript{32}
With this statement, Chrysostom declares that Judaism has no insight into the meaning of its foundational texts, because truth is “revealed not by wisdom, but by the Holy Ghost.”\textsuperscript{33} And only that Ghost can reveal that Passover means:

The Son of God incarnate shall be slain, and shall set free the whole world, and shall grant both to Greeks and to Barbarians to taste of this blood, and shall open heaven to all, and shall offer what is there to the whole human race, and having taken His flesh steeped in blood, shall exalt it above the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, and, in a word, above all the hosts on high, of the angels and archangels and all the other powers, and shall cause it to sit down upon the throne itself of the King, on the right hand of the Father shining in unspeakable glory.\textsuperscript{34}

Jewish interpretation, in these homilies, is defined by its inability to discover the meaning of the words, because that meaning rests on an understanding of how the past influences the future that can only have been revealed by the Spirit. The closure of the future allows the assignment of a definitive meaning to all Jewish sacred texts inaccessible to the Jews, who have not accepted their final place as assigned by the Christian future. Meaning, in Chrysostom’s homilies on First Corinthians, consists of understanding the intention of a past text toward a future. It is essentially temporal and historical, and relegates the Jews to a prehistory of the truth.

It is Chrysostom’s homilies on Second Corinthians that tie virginity to Judaism, and explicate the significance of Foucault’s paraphrastic slip. Paul, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, establishes the basic principles of Christian hermeneutics that inform Chrysostom’s theological-historical frame.\textsuperscript{35} Several of the most important passages for the development of that hermeneutic occur in the third verse of Second Corinthians,\textsuperscript{36} which deals with the relation between the letter and the spirit, elaborating on the relationship between doing and understanding laid out in Chrysostom’s

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\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., Homily VII, 81.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., Homily XXXIV, 475.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
homilies on First Corinthians.

He begins with Paul’s declaration that “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show us that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” For Chrysostom, this phrase serves as evidence of a transformation of the textual law: “He called them [the Corinthians] an epistle; but here an epistle of Christ, as having the Law of God written in them. For, what things God wished to declare to all and to you these are written in your hearts. But it was we, who prepared you to revise the writing. For just as Moses hewed the stones and tables, so we, your souls.” Rhetorically effecting several transformations at once, Chrysostom replaces the written law with Paul’s epistle, which he relocates from the page into the heart of its reader. The law, then, is given as already interpreted, and inscribed within its subject.

But the question remains why such a transformation is necessary, if God decreed to original law, and the Spirit decreed the new. Taking 2 Corinthians 3 line by line, Chrysostom writes: “Written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart (2 Cor 3.3). Wide as the difference between the Spirit and ink, and a stony table and a fleshy, so wide is that between these and those.” The abrogation of the old law by the new becomes, in Pauls’ epistle and in Chrysostom’s interpretation of it, a hermeneutical principle in which the interpretation of ink and stone is incapable of rendering up truth, which is available only through the understanding of a fleshly writing granted by the Spirit.

The Jews, in this schema, are bound to the flesh in a different (and much inferior) way than the Christians. Their flesh, rejecting the transformative inscription of the Spirit, remains in a carnal

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37 2 Cor 3.5, The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 2029.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 82.
and imperfect state. Chrysostom takes as evidence Paul’s discussion of the veil over Moses’s face when he brought the tables of the Law down from Sinai:

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.41

In Chrysostom’s view, this explains the hermeneutic fleshliness of the Jews: “For what happened then, once, in the case of Moses, the same happened continually in the case of the Law. What is said therefore, is no accusation of the Law, as neither is it of Moses that he then vailed himself, but only the senseless Jews. For the law hath its proper glory, but they were unable to see it.”42 God is not responsible for the inert materiality of the written law on this account; it is the Jews who are responsible for interpreting it in a material way. The material interpretation is transgression under the guise of observance, as Chrysostom argues when he says, “So that when thou shalt have forsaken the Law, thou shalt then see the Law clearly; but so long as thou abidest by it, and believest not Christ, thou knows not even the Law itself.”43 The problem with the law is not in the law itself, but in the Jews’ refusal to read it properly, which is due to their insistence on reading only with “the eyes of the body”44 which are constitutively incapable of recognizing the meaning, and the glory, of the word of God. To be Jewish is to be of “carnal mind,”45 and thus to be left outside the history of the world to which Christ has come, and outside the new definition of a subject with his or her

43 Ibid., 95
44 This passage is somewhat difficult to interpret, due both the Chrysostom’s involved syntax and the translation (which I cannot myself evaluate, but which appears tortured). It reads, in full: “There was yet wanting to this comparison the addition of a further and not trifling particular, that of the glory of Moses; such as in the case of the New Covenant none saw with the eyes of the body. And even for this cause it appear a great thing, in that the glory was perceived by the senses; for it was seen by the bodily eyes, even though it might not be approached) but that of the New covenant is perceived by the understanding.” It seems that Chrysostom means to say that Moses indeed was privy to the full meaning of the law, but veiled himself because Israel was not yet able to understand, and the Glory would injure (or possibly be injured by) their fleshly eyes. It is thus the insistence of the Jews on remaining bound to an interpretation according to the flesh, their own and that of the letter, that is challenged by the New Covenant. Ibid., VII, 88.
inscribable interior.

Foucault's paraphrase of a section of John Cassians's *Conferences* completes the argument that Chrysostom has implicitly advanced: “Il faut renoncer à la fornication du corps si on veut comprendre les Écritures, mais il faut aussi se tenir éloigné de cette ‘fornication’ que sont les ceremonies idolâtres, les superstitions païennes, les augures, les presages, et de cette autre fornication qu’est l’observance de la loi sur le mode judaïque.”

The wording is almost identical to that in the French translation of Cassian:

Il est écrit dans la Loi: ‘Vous ne forniquerez point.’ L’homme encore prisonnier des vices honteux de la chair gardera utilement ce precept, en le prenant simplement au sens littéral. Celui, au contraire, qui s’est dégagé de cette boue et de ces affections impures, doit l’observer spirituellement. C’est-à-dire qu’il se tiendra éloigné non seulement des cérémonies idolâtres, mais de toute superstition païenne, des augures, des presages, de l’observation des signes, des jours et des temps.

Fornication, which in Cassian’s elaboration of monastic rules has a spiritual as well as a physical sense, is identified implicitly with “the observation of signs, days and times,” which implicitly index the letter of the law of Judaism. As if to make sure that his readers do not misunderstand, Cassian moves on to cite two prophetic texts on the historical fornications of Israel, and to not that, even freed of these previous impurities, there is a third:

Elle consiste dans les superstitions de la Loi et du judaïsme que l’Apôtre a en vue lorsqu’il dit: ‘Vous observez les mois, les tempts et les années’ (Galatians 4.10); et de nouveau: ‘On vous prescrit: Ne prends pas! Ne goûte pas! Ne touche pas!’ (Colossians 2.21). Il n’est pas douteux, en effet, que ces paroles ne visent les superstitions de la Loi. Or, y tomber, c’est se rendre adulte à l’égard du Christ.

To observe the Law according to Judaism is definitively, according to Cassian, fornication and adultery. A Judaic hermeneutic has been constructed that is itself fornication, rather than merely

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46 Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair*, 221.
48 As Foucault helpfully puts it: “La chasteté du corps est la première forme d’une série de ‘chastetés’ que l’esprit doit revêtir pour avancer vers la connaissance spirituelle sans jamais s’en détacher. Foucault, *Les aveux*, 221.
49 “Telle est la fornication dont il est dit que Jérusalem aussi s’est souillée, lorsqu’elle s’est déshonorée ‘sur toute colline élevée et sous tout arbre vert’ (Jeremiah 3.6)... Telle est aussi la faute dont il accuse ailleurs son peuple: ‘Un esprit de fornication les a égarés, et il ont forniqué en se soustrayant à leur Dieu’ (Hosea 4.12).” Cassien, *Conferences*, XI.3, 383.
50 Ibid., XI.3-4, 383, 385.
impurity, precisely because “le rapport de soi à soi” has been developed in relation to it.

As Foucault so carefully notes: “la pureté n’est pas simplement une condition, elle en est simultanément un effet. Pas de pureté de coeur si l’âme ne veille attentivement sur elle-même, guettant les mouvements qui se produisent en elle et écartant tout ce qui peut la détourner de sa contemplation.” Purity, for Cassian, requires constant hermeneutic examination of the self to prevent impurities presented by “spirits” from crossing its borders and taking root. Although Foucault pays precise attention to the constitution of these spirits and the relation to the self required for their control, he neglects the fact that, in his own summary of Cassian, it is Judaism that constitutes impurity as an intentional action undertaken by the self, one with which Christianity has always been in combat. Read in light of John Chrysostom, his older contemporary and patron, Jewish hermeneutics denies the theological conception of history in which Christ has transfigured the physical letter into the spirit that is transcribed into every believing body. It insists on fornication as the law, dragging both the letter and the body back into the dying flesh. It is within this context that virginity has its value: as a practice, it acts on both the law and on the self, transforming the old hermeneutic into the new and in doing so, renewing the flesh to affirm the redemption of history.

Accounting for the History of Religion

Returning momentarily to Judeo-Christianity, I would like to examine Foucault’s account of the Hegelian attachment to the category of religion:

51 Foucault, Les Aveux, 222.
52 Cassian considers sin to be the result of “spirits” that attempt to insert thoughts that disturb one’s tranquillity (Foucault, Les aveux, 226), such that the spiritual combat of asceticism is not only “exercice, entraînement, volonté de se dépasser, travail de soi sur soi, contrôle et mesure de ses propres forces,” (Ibid.) but “guerre contre un adversaire” in which “la lutte se déroule contre un autre,” (Ibid.). The point at which this fight against adversaries begins to implicate “le rapport de soi à soi” is temptation, considered as “un élément dynamique dans les relations entre l’extérieur et l’intérieur de l’âme,” (Ibid., 229).
53 It is apparently common knowledge among aficionados of Eastern Orthodox Christianity that Cassian travelled to Constantinople, was ordained a deacon by Chrysostom, and remained there as a member of the latter’s clerical circle until Chrysostom was stripped of his episcopate—at which point it was Cassian who was dispatched to Rome to plead Chrysostom’s case. Sources: https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxyandheterodoxy/2012/08/13/the-curious-case-of-st-john-cassian/ ; https://www.clarion-journal.com/clarion_journal_of_spirit/2013/08/john-chrysostom-and-western-christianity-by-ron-dart.html.
Si vous prenez le mouvement hégélien ou post-hégélien jusque vers les années 1840-1848, vous vous apercevez qu’l’auto-analyse de l’Occident s’est fait chez les jeunes hégéliens avant tout en termes d’analyse judéo-chrétienne. Qu’en est-il de la conscience religieuse, quel est le statut de notre conscience religieuse, et en quoi cette conscience religieuse peut-elle rendre compte effectivement de ce que nous sommes? Foucault treats these questions as belonging to a different philosophical régime, particular to Germany, and influential in constructing the German notion of subjectivity—a valid point, certainly, but one that ignores the possibility that religion might, indeed, be able to effectively account for that which we are. For that to be possible, religion would have to be historicized, and perhaps considered as the ideology that produces the teleology within which the human is meaningful.

But Foucault is not a historian of religion; indeed, “religion” is among the imprecise concepts that his own work resists. Genealogy, in his account of the term, stands against the “history of historians,” which claims “un point d’appui hors du temps; elle prétend tout juger selon une objectivité d’apocalypse; mais c’est qu’elle a supposé une vérité éternelle, une âme qui ne meurt pas, une conscience toujours identique à soi.” Genealogy, in contrast, looks to “le corps: surfaces d’inscriptions événements (alors que le langage les marque et les idées les dissolvent),” avoiding the “tradition de l’histoire (théologique ou rationaliste) qui tend à dissoudre l’événement singulier dans une continuité idéale.” But it is precisely the body as the inscription of a theological tradition of history that situates itself at the brink of a literal apocalypse that Foucault overlooks in his pursuit of the ethical subject.

As my examination of John Chrysostom’s and John Cassian’s writings of virginity attempts to show, Judaism is the physical body against which the value of the virgin body in Christianity is established. The physicality of the Jews is paradoxically not physical. As Daniel Boyarin elegantly explains:

54 Foucault, *Subjectivité et vérité*, 44.
55 Although there have certainly been genealogies of religion since Foucault; for example, that of Talal Asad.
56 Foucault, “Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire,” in *Homage à Jean Hyppolite*, 159.
57 Ibid., 154.
58 Ibid., 161.
Israel according to the flesh—i.e., the Jews—by its very insistence that it is the true Israel demonstrates that it does not understand that there is both a carnal and a spiritual sense to scripture, and by this demonstration, this people condemns itself to remain forever and indisputably carnal and not spiritual. The carnality of Israel’s understanding is what consigns it forever to the realm of the flesh. That is to say, the hermeneutic practices of the rabbinitic Jews, their corporeal existence as a people and their emphasis on sex and reproduction, are all stigmatized as ‘carnal’ by the Father. 59

Within Christianity, the carnality of the Jew is thus produced by his hermeneutics—a conception of the relation between spirit and flesh that is a critical station on the way toward establishing the hermeneutic subject, the “rapport de soi à soi.” To consider, as do Chrysostom, Cassian and later, Augustine, the Jew as carnal by virtue of his hermeneutic practice, is to establish a relationship between hermeneutics and the human that makes it possible to conceive of virginity as a spiritual bodily practice that founds a hermeneutic practice. In the early Christian texts that Foucault is reading, “hermeneutics becomes anthropology.” 60 Virginity, then, is not only a location at which the relation of the self to the self takes a recognizable shape, but is a point at which history is rewritten upon the body, a point at which writing and the body are both renewed through the positing of a theological frame in which the end of history is an object of certain knowledge. Virgin flesh, conceptualized in relation to Jewish flesh, then takes on the significance of the events that Foucault considers the proper object of genealogy: “un rapport de forces qui s’inverse, un pouvoir confisqué, un vocabulaire repris et retourné contre ses utilisateurs.” 61 But the Jewish conception of the law was not dominant; Christianity did not use the law against its proper benefiteers, but took in hand and reversed the vocabulary of the law, the hermeneutics of the law, in order to turn it to a completely different purpose, in the process inventing the new anthropology, the subjectivity, that is the object of Foucault’s project.

It would be unfair, and possibly absurd, to argue that Foucault’s history of subjectivity is invalid because it elides the role of Judaism in the development of the Christian subject. Rather, I

59 Daniel Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 1-2.
60 Ibid., 9.
61 Foucault, “Nietzsche, la généalogy, l’histoire,” 161.
want to point out that the presence of Judaism in Foucault’s genealogy is ineradicable: even the simplest paraphrase reveals the conceptual dependence of Christian virginity on Jewish carnality. My goal (in contrast to, for example, Boyarin’s) is not to elucidate Jewish models of body, self and subjectivity in contradistinction to Christian polemical portraits of the Jew, but to show that Foucault, in working against the theological apparatuses of Christianity that have shaped the concept of history, neglects to account for their history—a history is born in the midst of his history, and which requires an account of meaning in order to explain the value of virginity in Christianity and its differentiation from its pagan value. And the genealogy of meaning must lead to Judaism, to the anti-Judaism of Paul, and that of the sources that Foucault reads so carefully in *Les Aveux de la chair*. The history of religion has been done many times and in different ways; here, it would be instrumental in theorizing a relationship between Judaism and Christianity that is not Judeo-Christianity, but a productive point of departure for examining the hermeneutics that Foucault considers central to the subject.
Works Cited


